

The Tuscaloosa News

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Quarantine for Ebola patients valid option

The logic is hard to follow. Health care workers would go to a developing nation, live in relatively primitive conditions and possibly expose themselves to one of the world's deadliest diseases for which there is no cure. But they would be deterred from taking on the task by a three-week quarantine in a safe, clean U.S. facility?

Quarantine runs contrary to the principles this country is founded on. Without committing a crime, nay, for undertaking an act of compassion and mercy, people are detained against their will. So it's no wonder that people don't like the idea very much. But the argument against it is counterintuitive.

At this point, the U.S. government is treating livestock that comes from other countries with more caution than it is people arriving from countries where the Ebola epidemic is occurring. Fruits, vegetables and animals from beyond the borders of the United States are regularly quarantined in order to prevent diseases, insects and parasites that don't exist here from entering the country and disrupting agriculture.

That's because it's sound science and a common-sense precaution. So why isn't it a reasonable way to protect this country's human population?

Of course, fruits, vegetables and livestock don't have constitutional rights. And that is no small consideration. Kaci Hickox, a nurse quarantined under New Jersey's new policy, called her quarantine "inhuman."

"We have to be very careful about letting politicians make health decisions," Hickox said.

We hate to tell her, but that ship has sailed. The Affordable Care Act is one example that comes immediately to mind. Still, we understand her concerns and don't envy the position she's in.

On the other hand, the Ebola virus has gotten into the United States. That's an indisputable fact. And because it was carried into the United States, people who live here have been infected. Thankfully, treatment begun in the early stages of infection has been effective.

Perhaps the fear has been exaggerated. It's been pointed out that while Americans are obsessing about Ebola, they are still dropping dead by the thousands daily from cancer, heart disease and other ailments that are much more likely to afflict them.

Complete isolationism is not the answer. With its resources and technology, the United States is needed in the fight against the Ebola epidemic in Africa, and Americans will be safer when the epidemic is halted at its source.

We just have difficulty understanding why combating the disease in Africa and protecting Americans from infection are mutually exclusive. It will impose a hardship on medical workers and other people coming from countries affected by the Ebola epidemic to quarantine them.

Certainly everything possible should be done to make quarantine safe and as pleasant as possible. But it seems like a reasonable precaution in the face of a deadly disease.

WANT A VOICE?

The Tuscaloosa News welcomes our readers' opinions on issues of public concern.

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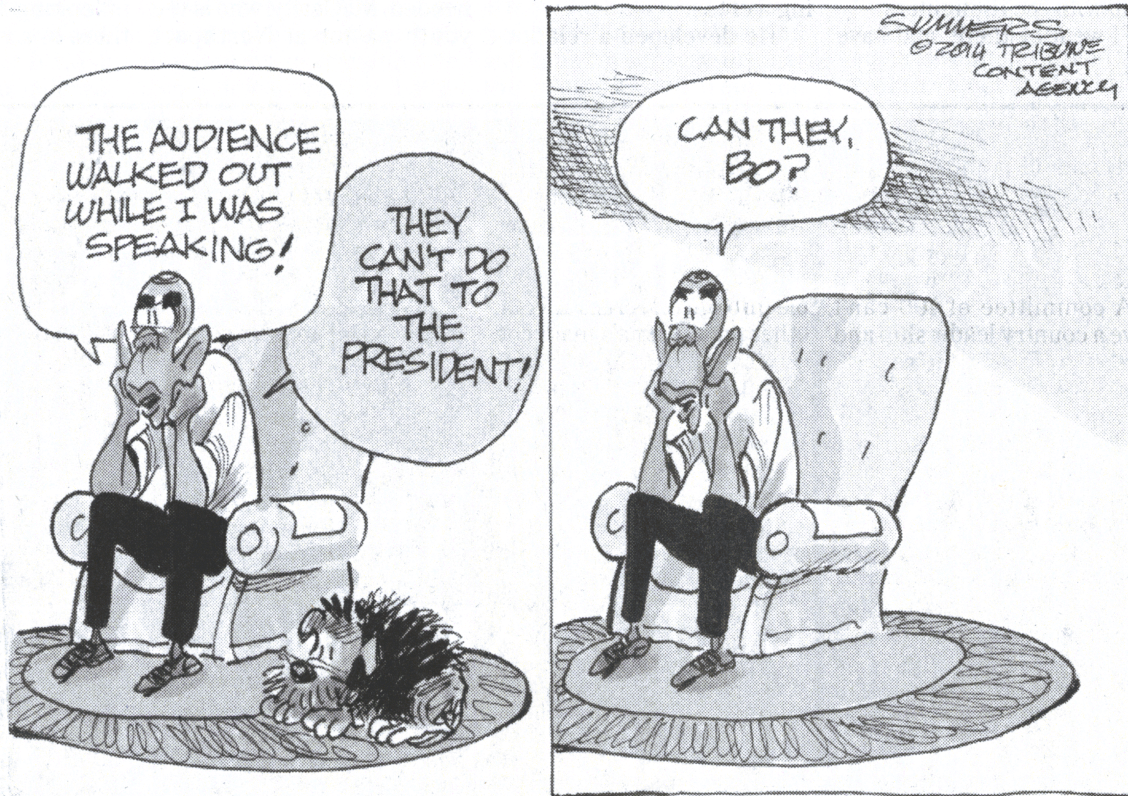
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Opinion

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Baseball swings, misses at cancer

Major League Baseball isn't standing tall enough against cancer, in spite of its partnership with Stand Up To Cancer, a fundraising organization for cancer research. Before a national TV audience of more than 15 million on Friday night during Game Three of the World Series, Major League Baseball missed a golden opportunity to send a message to the public that a third of all cancer deaths can be prevented.



ALAN BLUM

At the end of the sixth inning, Major League Baseball officials, players, umpires and fans stood silently in the stands and in the dugouts, each holding a placard with the name of someone with cancer.

But this wasn't just another plea to give money for cancer research. It was also a tribute by Major League Baseball to the late Tony Gwynn, the Hall of Fame outfielder and eight-time American League batting champion, who died this year from cancer at age 54. Yet there was no mention of the type of cancer that killed him — cancer of the salivary glands — or the fact that since oral cancer is almost always caused by cigarette smoking or smokeless tobacco, it is almost entirely avoidable.

Tony Gwynn himself blamed his 20-year addiction to smokeless tobacco for his oral cancer, and urged young people never to use it. Another baseball great, former Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt

MY TURN

Schilling, 47, revealed this year that his use of chewing tobacco led to his oral cancer. And Doug Harvey, named the second greatest umpire by the Society for American Baseball Research, attributed his oral cancer to smokeless tobacco use.

Harvey has shared his story with college athletes throughout the U.S., including the University of Alabama, as has Heisman Trophy winner Pat Sullivan, another sports star who developed cancer of the tongue from the use of smokeless tobacco. According to the Alabama Department of Health, an estimated 19 percent of high school boys used smokeless tobacco in 2012, much higher than the national prevalence of 11.2 percent, and the rate is rising.

In its four nationally televised fundraising telethons, Stand Up To Cancer has never shown or talked about the disfigurement and emotional toll of oral cancer and its treatment, much less used its valuable air time for a call to America's youth to avoid tobacco at any cost. Just send money, no questions asked, no judgments made.

In fairness to Major League Baseball, in 2011 its officials tried to follow the lead of Minor League Baseball in 1993 and the NCAA in 1994 by barring players from using smokeless tobacco, but the Major League Baseball Players' Association rejected the idea. More than 30 percent of Major League Baseball players are still estimated to be using smokeless tobacco, although the number is down from 50 percent just a decade ago. Two top pitchers, Stephen

Strasburg and Addison Reed, who both played for Gwynn at San Diego State, have quit smokeless tobacco in tribute to their coach.

Cancer is not a single disease but more than 200 different kinds of diseases, many of which are caused entirely by tobacco and are thus avoidable. Similarly, malignant melanoma, one of the most rapidly increasing cancers among young women — and among the most lethal — can be largely prevented by the avoidance of sunburns and tanning beds. Yet the very group who should be avoiding tanning beds at all costs — college students — are the ones who use tanning beds the most. Not surprisingly, they're the group that tanning salons target in their advertising, especially in college newspapers.

While we need to support cancer research, we should not do so at the expense of educating the public at every opportunity about the things we already know how to do to prevent the majority of cancers. Most people think they've heard all the facts about smoking, smokeless tobacco and tanning beds. But haven't we already seen and heard plenty about the different brands of smokeless tobacco and tanning salons? Apparently not, because otherwise they wouldn't need to be working so hard to get their message out and to try to hook the next generation.

Alan Blum, M.D., is Gerald Leon Wallace, M.D., Endowed Chair in Family Medicine at the University of Alabama, where he directs the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. Readers can email him at ablum@cchs.ua.edu.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Tuscaloosa News will attempt to publish as many letters relating to the Nov. 4 election as possible. Anyone interested in having a letter relating to the election published on or before Nov. 4 should make sure that it has been delivered to The Tuscaloosa News no later than noon, Oct. 30.

Phil Poole will make District 21 better

Dear Editor: I would like to remind the people of District 21 that they have an opportunity to make their district a better place to live by voting for Phil Poole for Alabama State Senate. He previously represented District 21 from 1995 until 2010. During his term, he was a strong supporter of veterans and military service as well as their families. He brought millions of dollars in road projects to West Alabama including U.S. Highway 82 West, the four-lane between Buhl and the Pickens County line and between Reform and Ethelsville, to name a few.

Phil Poole has been falsely accused of being a lot of things. However, there are some facts I know to be true. He is pro-life, pro-Second Amendment, a Christian, and in his 28 years of service, he never voted for a raise for legislators. The accusation of him being a liberal is certainly not true. A state senator has nothing to do with the current federal agenda whatsoever.

Phil Poole is a genuine person and someone you can talk to like an old friend. He cares about the people he is elected to represent, and has helped with funding for many community projects and organizations such as senior citizens programs, RISE and volunteer fire departments. He has taken a personal interest in struggling communities and the concerns of the people he represents.

District 21 deserves a hard-working senator, and that man is Phil Poole.

Jackie Sullivan
Tuscaloosa County

Letter writer made sure purse returned

Dear Editor: Many years ago when we had a Kroger in Tuscaloosa, after shopping there one day, I foolishly left my purse in the shopping cart in the parking lot. When I almost got home, I realized I didn't have my purse with me. I immediately went back to the store, and my purse was not in the cart outside. I then went inside and asked if anyone had turned it in as a lost item. No one had.

All the way home I was so worried about it (mostly the credit cards that were in it). When I got home, my husband was talking on the phone and when he hung up, he said it was a call from someone who had my purse at her home, and we could come get it. I was elated.

We both went to her house, I hugged her and she invited us in and served us tea. I only had \$17 cash in my purse. I offered it to her, and she refused it. She said the reason she brought my purse home with her was so she could be sure I got it back. I hugged and thanked her when we left her house.

I have noticed over the years that she has had several letters printed in the paper, and I have always agreed with what she writes.

Her name is Olympia McCracken, and I just wanted to pay her tribute.

Sarah W. Armstrong
Tuscaloosa

Pelosi looks past Dems' grim present

"We don't agonize. We organize," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi chimed after an editorial board meeting with



DEBRA SAUNDERS

the San Francisco Chronicle on Monday. 2014 is probably not her favorite year. In 2010, the Democrats lost the House, and she lost the speakership. Polling suggests Democrats will lose more seats in November. Pelosi has become the other face of the Democratic Party, second only to the unpopular President Barack Obama. Republicans raise money by dangling her name in front of donors. She even mused about leaving Washington. Someday.

Now even the rare Democrat is moving away from the party leader. "I am not Nancy Pelosi," Democrat Gwen Graham, the daughter of former Florida Gov. Bob Graham, declared. She is challenging Rep. Steve Southerland, R-Fla. At a recent debate, Graham chastised her fellow Democrats for playing up the so-called GOP "war on women" and faulted Pelosi for pushing through the Affordable Care Act without Republican votes.

Even if Democrats lose seats, expect Pelosi to hang on to her leadership position. After all, she has raised more than \$400 million for fellow Democrats during her dozen years as their leader. This year, her office boasts, she raised more than one-third of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's haul. It is a testament to Madam Leader's discipline that she can raise all that cash and nonetheless denounce the GOP for its ties to "big money."

This year, Capitol Hill staffers named Pelosi the "most partisan" House member in an informal survey by Washingtonian. Be it noted, last year Pelosi told USA Today that Obama is "one of the most practically nonpartisan presidents" she's ever seen.

When I asked her whether she is polarizing, Pelosi answered, "I think they're trying to make me a polarizing figure. I think the president has really assumed that role in this election. I don't think they're paying much attention to me, but if they were, it's just a demonstration of the bankruptcy of their ideas."

All she really cares about, Pelosi asserted, is the Affordable Care Act.

It was vintage Pelosi. "Me being speaker is the least important thing to me," she said. And: "I don't know why we all sit around and talk about these things." At 74, Pelosi has begun to hint at retirement — maybe after the big Democratic wins she foresees in 2016. "If we were to win and I didn't have to worry about these things anymore," she told the Chronicle, "I'm back in the city." She meant San Francisco, where she is seen as a moderate, not Washington.

But then, Pelosi has to talk about 2016 because there's not much upbeat she can say about 2014. The DCCC has yanked money intended for Democratic hopefuls to bolster the sagging campaigns of endangered incumbents. The New York Times forecasts a 68 percent chance of the GOP's winning the Senate. The RealClearPolitics poll average lists Obama's disapproval rating at 53 percent.

The Dems' "war on women" mantra isn't working. The only thing the Democrats have going for them is the public's distaste for the Republican Party — which, to paraphrase Pelosi, demonstrates the bankruptcy of their ideas.

Debra Saunders is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Readers can email her at dsaunders@sfgchronicle.com.